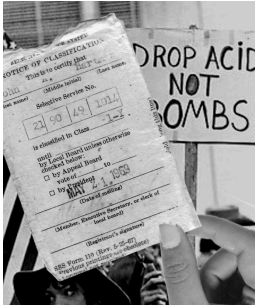


Can You Feel A Draft?



Once, when Uncle Sam needed bodies to fight wars, young males were drafted into service and shipped off to do battle.

I don't know how they knew, but within 30 days of my having washed out of college after an academically disastrous freshman year, the Selective Service - the folks who ran the draft - sent me the notice I dreaded most.

A black and white image of a Selective Service System form titled 'ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION'. The form is addressed to John A. Hartman at 2075 Floral Drive, White Bear Lake, Minn. It includes a greeting, the induction date of June 25, 1968, at 6:30 AM, and the location of the induction center in Minneapolis, Minn. The form is signed by a member of the local board.

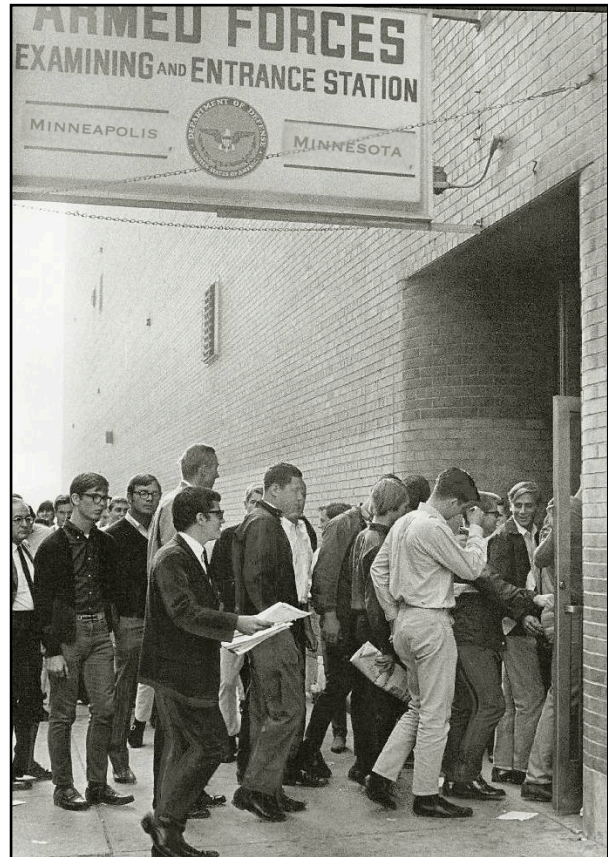
I viewed the invitation with dread. At that junction, about 500 American soldiers were being shipped home in body bags every week, an appalling figure. I was horrified by the prospect of dying in the jungle, facing an enemy I didn't know, fighting a pointless war.

My father, who was a decorated Air Force veteran of WW II, and who'd spent 9-months in a German POW camp toward the end of that conflict, was virulently anti-communist and fervently in favor of American efforts at defeating the Reds wherever they might be.

Having been bounced out of college, I was back living at my parent's home. As such, I was regularly made aware of my father's perspective on the war in Vietnam. We argued continuously about the conflict. Neither of us budged an inch.

As my induction date drew near, anxiety consumed me. I considered hightailing to Canada, but scotched that idea. I'd never travelled more than 120-miles from my home. I was 18, a wide-eyed neophyte, inexperienced and unsophisticated in the ways of the world. I was resigned to making my appearance at the draft center and began considering what Plan B might be.

The draft center was near downtown Minneapolis. My dad's office was in the Foshay Tower, so he offered to drop me off. The commute was 40-minutes. Early-on he attempted some small talk to ease the tension, but I remained silent, paralyzed by my fear. As we approached the draft center, I began to see gatherings of hippies carrying protest signs, chanting "hell no, we won't go." My dismay crescendoed just as we pulled up to the drop-off.



My dad was clearly agitated by the cacophony of the protest. There were cops everywhere, trying to keep a lid on things. There were soldiers standing guard at the entrance to the draft center, M-16s slung over their shoulders, a grim countenance on their faces. The smell of burning draft cards mixed with marijuana, lending a grisly odor to the distorted drama taking place.



Rocks were flying. Flags were burning. Nonsensically, I worried the paint job on my dad's '59 Ford Ranch wagon might be damaged. It was a real shit storm and I was stomping into the thick of it.

Turning to say thanks to my dad for the ride I never wanted, I caught him looking straight into my fear-filled eyes.

"Thanks Dad," I mumbled distractedly.

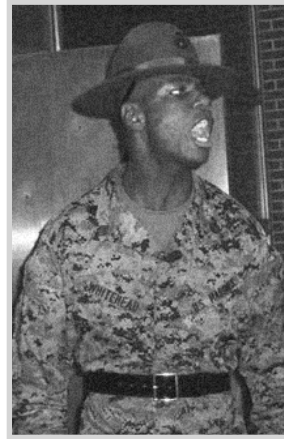
And then he said something totally unexpected.
"I hope you fail your physical."

I was speechless. We'd battled furiously over the disastrous US incursion into Vietnam, disrupting the family, upsetting my mother as we fought. And now, here he was, hoping that I would not have to experience the horrors he witnessed during his service.

"Thanks, dad," I muttered. Lost in despair, I stepped out of the car and walked past the armed troops.

The noise inside the large room was of a different nature. Uniformed soldiers and gloomy looking medics were barking orders at we draftees.

"Move that way, boy," "No... not that way. This way! Are you stupid, son."



The strain was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. My disorientation redoubled as we shuffled from station to station. A young black guy who'd been trash-talking was suddenly escorted through an unmarked door by

two burly soldiers, .45 pistols strapped on their hip. That dude was on the next plane too Saigon I guessed.

After what felt an eternity of pointless mental and physical tests, suddenly the entire thing was over. We were lined-up at the exit, with one more table to stop at before leaving. Here I would learn my fate.

As the soldier stamped my papers, he barked, *"Let me see that hand of yours, boy."* I held up my left hand, proffering the absent finger I'd lost a month earlier in an industrial accident at a brass foundry I was working at.

"You're one lucky sombitch," he barked.
"Is that your trigger finger, son."

"Yes it is," I mumbled.

"Well, that's your ticket to a deferment boy. I suppose that makes you happy."

"You have no idea," I replied. *"No idea at all."* With that, I boarded the bus that took me back to the suburbs where, that evening, I told my dad I'd failed to his and my delight.

